

# DRCVI ANNUAL REPORT 2021

*“One child, one teacher, one book, one pen can change the world.”*

**Malala Yousafzai**



**DISABILITY RIGHTS**

CENTER OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

*Advancing Justice through Protection and Advocacy*



## MISSION STATEMENT

Advance the legal rights of people with disabilities, support and empower families and provide training and information that promotes the overall health and educational development of children and youth.

# STAYING FOCUSED ON IMPROVING THE LIVES OF VIRGIN ISLANDERS WITH DISABILITIES: ADVOCACY DURING AN UNRELENTING PANDEMIC

During 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to pose remarkable challenges to our work as community advocates. In our pandemic-plagued working environment we had to explore how to safely provide professional services that is more accessible, useful, and innovative. We successfully accomplished that by:

- Continuing to provide engaging virtual platforms for community-based training on such topics as educational equity and the employment rights of people with disabilities
- Submitting an amicus curiae or "friend of the court" brief before the Supreme Court of the United States in collaboration with the National Disability Rights Network and Guam Legal Services challenging the constitutionality of excluding people who live in 4 U.S. territories from the benefits of the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program
- Producing and broadcasting a series of COVID-19 health and safety updates in collaboration with the VI Department of Health and other medical providers



# LIMITED CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS IN THE U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

In the Spring of 2021, DRCVI released its long-anticipated report, *Shadow Citizens: Confronting Federal Discrimination in the U.S. Virgin Islands*. This report offers the most comprehensive picture to-date of federal laws and programs that discriminate against the U.S. Virgin Islands with respect to persons who are low-income earners. The report



explains the mechanics of key federal programs that currently single out the U.S. Virgin Islands for unequal treatment, assesses their combined negative impact on the Territory over time, and provides key recommendations for speaking up on behalf of Virgin Islanders most harmed by this systemic discrimination.

## MEDIA OUTREACH



DRCVI continues to expand its effort to share information with our community by way of traditional media, texting, and social media. DRCVI produces and presents its weekly Ability Radio program on WLDV 107.9 FM "Da Vybe" every Saturday and Sunday.

DRCVI in collaboration with WTJX, Channel 12, the Territory's Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) hosts a monthly television show called *Able to Raise*. The program features interviews from V.I. cultural bearers, and experts covering topics dealing with health & wellness, education, arts, self-advocacy, and more.

# CONTINUING OUR WORK FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

DRCVI along with the Small Business Development Center, the Economic Development Center, and the Northeast ADA Center presented thirty-eight (38) workshops on the following topics: employment accommodations and workers with disabilities, transition and career development, engaging persons with disabilities in the employment process, best practices for recruiting people with disabilities, addressing mental health during the pandemic, and employment rights and responsibilities in the work place. The training sessions were created to provide useful information to persons who are interested in finding a job, keeping a job, starting their own business or how to support employees.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought to the fore, even more emphatically, the inequity and hardship that the disability community faces daily. Foremost in our future, is engaging individuals with mental illness and their families in addressing what has now become a mental health emergency. This will include working with leaders and community groups to implement effective client services. Another goal is to create outreach activities that help close the digital divide - advocating for greater access to broadband networks, devices, and improving computer literacy. And lastly, seek to have jet bridges installed at our airports to assist and encourage travel for individuals with disabilities.



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de la Aerolínea

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# CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF LEADERSHIP



In May of 2021 Amelia Headley LaMont retired as DRCVI's Executive Director having served in that capacity for 25 years. It was an emotional departure for her and the staff, and she is grateful for all the kindness,

support and well wishes that she received from her co-workers, family, and community allies.

Angus Drigo was chosen to be DRCVI's new Executive Director. He has a background in finance and a wealth of experience in managing federal grants. Angus served as a devoted Board member to DRCVI and has been a long time advocate for his own family members. He approaches his work with compassion and respect for the community we serve.

# MONITOR LOCAL RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES

DRCVI, as authorized by law, is the protection and advocacy agency responsible for conducting monitoring visits at residential facilities in the U.S. Virgin Islands. This ensures that clients receive appropriate care and treatment and are not subject to abuse or neglect. The year 2021 was no exception, despite some challenges brought on in adhering to COVID-19 social distancing guidelines. DRCVI's legal staff quickly made the pandemic-related adjustments in order that we could conduct in-person or virtual monitoring at 14 local facilities.



## **2021 DRCVI Board of Directors**

Veronica Handy, Chairman  
Lisa Bass  
Kennesha Bedminster  
Abigail Cyntje  
Olutayo Delano  
Brenda Gujral, Treasurer  
Flavia Logie  
Sherilyn Pogson, Secretary  
Chevell Simeon

## **2021 PAIMI (Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Mental Illness) Advisory Council**

Abigail Cyntje, Chairman  
Joanna Delano  
Karen Brown, PhD.  
Richard Callwood  
Scot McChain  
Patricia Towal

## **DRCVI Staff and Support**

Vincent Anderson, CPA Fiscal Administrator  
Iris Bermudez, Advocate  
James Campbell, Legal Intern  
Shammi Carr, Advocate  
Kishma Creque, Administrative Legal Assistant  
Angus Drigo, Executive Director  
Amelia Headley LaMont, Former Executive Director  
Ullmont James, Administrative Assistant  
Archie Jennings, Esq., Director of Advocacy  
Kippy Roberson, Esq., Staff Attorney  
Nicole Ross, Communications Specialist

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